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ABSTRACT

A national sample of 3,300 elementary and secondary school teachers, who had recently administered the Metropolitan Achievement Tests in their classrooms, responded to a questionnaire concerning various standardized achievement test issues. Teachers gave their opinion on: the amount of such testing in their schools; personal use of test results; possible test score applications; and various test moratoriums and other test-related policies. The teachers were instructed to base their answers on their attitudes toward standardized tests in general. Data were analyzed according to teacher's grade level (K-4, 5-8, or 9-12) and type of school system (small public schools, large public schools, or private schools). The teachers' opinions about the amount of testing in their system were generally found to be positive. Grade level and system differences were small; however, high school teachers were generally more satisfied than elementary teachers. Nine percent of the respondents indicated that they made considerable use of test results; 48% made "some" use of test data. Specific uses and applications were also indicated. Responses favoring a moratorium against standardized testing involved intelligence tests, state-mandated achievement tests, and testing in large school systems or in the primary grades. Fifty-nine percent favored the use of competency testing results to determine high school graduation. (GDC)

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ABSTRACT

TEACHERS' OPINIONS OF STANDARDIZED TEST USE AND USEFULNESS

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A representative national sample of over 3300 teachers of Grades K-12 responded to a questionnaire concerning various standardized achievement test issues. Teachers gave their opinion on the amount of such testing in their schools, their personal use of such instruments, their views on a variety of possible test score applications, and their reaction to various test moratoriums and other test-related policies. Results were analyzed separately for teachers in different sizes/types of school systems and according to three grade groups. Data indicate generally positive attitudes toward most typical uses of standardized achievement tests.

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1979.

TEACHERS' OPINIONS OF STANDARDIZED TEST USE AND USEFULNESS

Michael D. Beck & Frank P. Stetz
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The 1970's have characterized by many problems in education, e.g., diminishing enrollments, escalating costs to maintain services, attacks on the weak academic skills of our high school graduates. In the area of educational tests and measurement, vocal and sustained criticism has been aimed at the value of standardized tests.

A quick perusal of the professional literature points out that most of the criticisms against standardized tests have been essays rather than reports of research conducted (c.f. Houts, 1977). Nonetheless, some excellent objective and scientific work has been done in this area.

Kirkland (1971) reviewed the effects of tests on students and schools. Other studies surveyed adults (Brim, 1965; Brim, Neulinger, & Glass, 1965), secondary school students (Brin, Goslin, Glass, & Goldberg, 1964; Neulinger, 1966), high school teachers and counselors (Brim, et al., 1964), elementary principals in the Northeast (Goslin, Epstein, & Hallock, 1965), fifth grade pupils (Goslin, 1967), and elementary and secondary counselors and teachers (Cormany, 1974). A comprehensive survey of Scholastic Aptitude Test takers concerning their opinions of the test has also been conducted (Response Analysis, 1978).

Purposes of the Study

While several studeis have been conducted that incorporated the polling of opinions on test use and usefulness, none have been reported in the last decade--a decade in which much of the criticism against tests has been voiced. Also, for the most part, sample respondents have been those with secondary attachments to such tests: parents, counselors, and principals. To the

authors' knowledge, a representative nationwide polling of elementary and secondary teachers has not been undertaken.

With these points in mind, the purposes of this paper were to explore: 1) teachers' sentiments regarding the amount of standardized testing in their school systems, 2) their uses of standardized achievement test results in their classrooms, and 3) their opinions concerning the usefulness of standardized test results for various purposes.

METHOD

Survey Instrument

A questionnaire was developed to elicit responses to items relating to the purposes above. Results from four of the questions are presented in this paper. The four questions concerned: 1) teacher's opinions of the amount of standardized testing in thier school system; 2) particular uses made by teachers of standardized achievement test results; 3) their views of the usefulness of a variety of possible application of test results; and, 4) their opinions on various test moratoriums and other test-related policies.

Although the questionnaire was not pilot tested prior to its administration, it was reviewed and revised by various editorial and administrative staff members. The mechanics of the questionnaire design, phrasing, comprehensiveness, etc. were all improved by the various revisions.

Sample & Procedures

The sample was comprised of all teachers participating in the Spring, 1978 standardization of the Metropolitan Achievement Tests. School systems included in the norming group were chosen to yield scores on a sample of students representative of the national school population in terms of geographic region, school system enrollment, socioeconomic status, and public vs. non-public school affiliation. The total sample consisted of approximately 3500 classroom teachers.

The questions used in this study werepart of a longer questionnaire designed for the norming program. The questionnaire also contained various items relating to the Metropolitan Achievement Tests series (content ratings judgments concerning timings and formats, reactions to directions, etc.). Teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire as soon as possible after testing was completed. Responses were anonymous except for school system identification, and completion of the questionnaire was optional.

Teachers were instructed to answer questions reported on here based on thier attitudes toward standardized tests in general, not in terms of the Metropolitan series. It is important to note, however, that teachers knew that test results from this norming program would not be returned to them during the school year. Further, participation in the norming program was not optional at a classroom level. Thus, all teachers had just completed the administration of an experimental version of a test they had not selected or requested to use, and from which they would receive no results. Finally, approximately 75% of the teachers had participated in the fall standardization of the tests six months earlier, under a similar set of circumstances.

Approximately 95% of the teachers participating in the standardization program returned the questionnaire. For purposes of data analysis, the sample was arbitrarily divided according to two variables--grade level taught and size and type of school system. Teachers were grouped by grade for Grades K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. For the system size and type variable, the three groups used were teachers in public school systems with fewer than 500 students per grade (Group 1), public school systems enrolling over 500 students per grade (Group 2),

and all non-public schools (Group 3). Table 1 summarizes the sample size in each of these group X grades cells. All subsequent analyses were made using these groups.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 2 summarizes teachers' responses to the question, "In general, the amount of standardized testing in your school system is . . ." Overall, 69% of the respondents answered "about right." Teachers in the two groups of public school systems--small (Group 1) and large (Group 2)-- responded similarly; more large-system teachers considered the amount of testing too great and 4% of this group felt there was too little testing. Teachers in non-public systems were generally satisfied with the amount of testing. Grade-group differences were small; about two-thirds of the teachers responded "about right." High school teachers as a group generally were somewhat more satisfied with the testing programs than were elementary teachers. Certainly, these data do not support the popularly held notion promoted by test critics that "most" teachers feel to much standardized testing takes place in schools.

Teachers were also asked how much they "... personally use standardized achievement tests results" in their classrooms. Results are presented in Table 3. Overall, about 10% of the respondents make "considerable" use of such results and just under 50% make "some" use of test data. For the three types of school systems, non-public school teachers make the most use of achievement test results, followed by small public-system teachers, and

large-system teachers. Grade-group comparisons show a similar response pattern for teachers in Grades K-4 and Grades 5-8, while high school teachers made significantly less use of results.

The questionnaire listed eight possible uses of standardized achievement test results. Teachers were asked to indicate whether they personally used tests for these purposes, and to indicate any other uses they made of such data. Across all respondents, an average of four uses were checked or listed. Table 4 summarizes the percent of teachers who indicated they used standardized achievement results for the eight listed purposes. The most frequent uses checked were for "diagnosing strengths and weaknesses" (74%), "measuring 'growth'" (66%), and "individual student evaluation" (65%). The most infrequently checked use was for "reporting to students" (24%). Fewer than 200 responses were written in by teachers for this question. The most typical free responses were "for grouping" and "to evaluate funded programs."

Across groups and uses, the rank orders of the percents in Table 4 are similar, although teachers in large public systems make fewer uses than the total sample and non-public school teachers make substantially more use of test results. The grade-group percents reveal similar patterns for teachers in Grades K-4 and Grades 5-8, with significantly fewer uses indicated by high school teachers.

The next question surveyed teacher opinions concerning the usefulness of standardized achievement test results for 17 various purposes listed in Table 5. A majority of teachers rated such instruments "useful" for 11 of the 17 purposes listed. Tor the total sample, the responses can be summarized as follows:

* Over 75% of teachers considered such tests useful for:
  - measuring educational "growth" of individual students
  - detecting system-wide general strengths and weaknesses
* Between 60% and 70% of respondents considered such tests useful for:
  - reporting to parents
  - helping to plan instruction for class groups
  - helping to plan instruction for individual students
  - measuring the educational status of individual students
* Fewer than 1/3 of the teachers considered such tests useful for:
  - reporting to newspapers (10%)
  - helping to evaluate teacher performance (21%)
  - comparing classes within a school (30%)

Table 6 summarizes responses to four questions concerning moratoriums against various tests. Fewer than one-sixth of the respondents favored a moratorium against all standardized tests, while approximately one-fourth favored such a stand on intelligence tests. Interestingly, almost one-third of the teachers favored a moratorium on state-mandated achievement tests. Across groups, teachers in small public and in non-public schools responded similarly; large-system teachers were somewhat more negative toward tests. In the grade groupings, the Grades K-4 sample more strongly favored all moratoriums than did the other groups. Teacher responses to this question seemingly are at odds with moratorium resolutions of organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Education Association.

The final questions asked teachers' opinions on four other test-related issues or policies. Responses are summarized in Table 7. A majority of teachers in all grades and groups favored "use of 'competency' test results to determine high school graduation." Interestingly, the percent of teachers approving of such test use in very similar to the percent of adults in the public at large who favor such programs (Gallup, 1978).

TABLE 1

Total Number of Teachers Responding--

by Grade and Group

Grades	Group 1	2	3	Total
K-4	815	499	202	1516
5-8	634	390	186	1210
9-12	352	182	46	580
Total	1801	1071	434	3306

TABLE 2

Teachers' Opinions of the Amount of Standardized Testing in Their School System--Percents of Teachers Marking Each Option, by Group, System Type and Grade

Amount of Testing in Your System:	Total Sample	Grades Combined			Groups Combined		
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Gr.K-4	Gr.5-8	Gr.9-12
Too Great	19	19	25	6	22	18	16
About Right	69	67	65	85	67	72	64
Too Little	7	9	4	4	5	6	13
No Answer	5	5	6	5	6	4	7

TABLE 3

Percent of Teachers Indicating Various Amounts of

Personal Use of Standardized Achievement Test Results

Personal use of test results:	Total Sample	Grades Combined			Groups Combined		
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Gr.K-4	Gr.5-8	Gr.9-12
Little	30	30	34	20	30	26	39
Some	48	48	45	54	51	53	28
Considerable	9	9	7	15	9	10	7
Not Applicable/ No Response	13	13	14	11	10	11	26

TABLE 4

Percents of Teachers Making Various Uses of Standardized Achievement Test Results in Their Classrooms

Personally use standardized achievement test results for:	Total Sample	Grades Combined			Groups Combined			Percent of Omits*
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Gr.K-4	Gr.5-8	Gr.9-12	
Individual student evaluation	65	63	60	80	65	68	55	7-11
Diagnosing strengths & weaknesses	74	74	70	84	77	76	63	6-9
Class evaluation	45	44	40	59	49	45	30	13-20
Instructional planning	52	51	51	58	52	56	42	10-16
Evaluation of teaching methods	37	36	36	44	40	37	29	15-20
Reporting to parents	42	41	40	54	44	46	28	13-20
Reporting to students	24	22	24	33	15	34	29	17-22
Measuring "growth"	66	67	61	77	71	66	43	8-18

*Percent of teachers in the various sub-samples who omitted this question

TABLE 5

Percents of Teachers Who Consider Standardized Achievement *

Test Results Useful for Various Purposes

Standardized test results	Total	Grades Combined			Groups Combined		
are useful to:	Sample	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Gr. K-4	Gr. 5-8	Gr. 9-12
report to newspapers	10	10	10	11	8	11	16
report to boards of education	52	53	51	54	46	56	62
report to parents	67	66	64	78	63	70	70
report progress to students	56	55	56	63	44	66	71
measure educational status of individuals	61	61	60	67	58	64	65
measure educational "growth" of individuals	77	79	73	83	77	78	76
screen special education students	56	57	52	67	51	59	65
help plan instruction for individuals	63	62	61	70	61	68	59
help plan instruction for class groups	65	65	61	72	65	67	57
detect system-wide general strengths/weaknesses	75	76	72	81	73	77	79
help evaluate teaching procedures or methods	34	34	32	44	36	35	30
help evaluate instructional materials	41	39	43	46	41	42	39
help evaluate teacher performance	21	21	17	30	19	23	19
compare students with a national peer groups	58	60	53	63	54	59	69
compare classes in a school	30	28	29	36	26	32	36
compare schools within a system	36	33	37	49	33	38	41
compare a system with systems across the country	56	58	54	59	52	58	65

*Across questions and sub-groups, 5-12% of the teachers omitted particular questions.

TABLE 6

Percents of Teachers Who Personally Would Favor

Various Monitoriums Against Standardized Tests

Percent of teachers personally favoring a moratorium on:	Total Sample	Grades Combined			Groups Combined		
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Gr. K-4	Gr. 5-8	Gr.9-12
All standardized tests	16	13	22	12	18	16	12
standardized intelligence tests	26	23	31	21	26	26	22
standardized achievement tests	19	17	23	13	21	18	14
state-mandated achievement tests	31	30	34	25	34	28	27

*10-14% of the teachers did not respond to these questions

TABLE 7

Percents of Teachers Who Would Favor

Various Test-Related Policies

Percent of teachers personally favoring:	Total Sample	Grades Combined			Groups Combined		
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Gr.K-4	Gr.5-8	Gr.9-12
1. the use of "competency" test results to determine high school graduation	59	58	59	62	53	63	66
2. additional training of school personnel in test interpretation and use	61	62	57	66	60	64	59
3. increased use of test results for school "accountability" purposes	22	22	19	30	18	23	31
4.increased use of criterion-referenced tests	38	37	38	39	35	40	37

*Percents of teachers not responding to these questions were: #1 - 4-7%; #2 - 6-9%; #3 - 7-10%; #4 - 17-24%